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Written Testimony – Submitted by Stephanie Gerdan, Tipton, MI  
House Agriculture Committee Hearing on  
House Bills 5711-5716

I first became aware of the mega-dairy farms from a former co-worker. We worked together on the Emerald Ash Borer task force. He told me the only reason he was working there was because he'd lost his job as a barn-hand at a local dairy farm that shut down because of the mega-farms that had opened up in the area. Then, I saw them.

As an EAB surveyor, it was my job to walk the properties of Lenawee and Hillsdale (later many other counties) and look for signs of infestation of the beetle. You get to see a lot of other things, too. Because I was a state employee, many of the property owners would talk to me about everything that may have to do with the State. I walked a wood-lot near one of the mega-farms on 127. Thankfully it was winter, and the wind was blowing the worst of the stench away from my partner and I, but you could still smell it. We came across a field tile drain in the woods, well hidden, and what was pouring out was disgusting. From the placement of it, it was fairly apparant that it was coming from the farm.

Then, we saw the leg. I guess on most dairy farms, there's things called "dead-pits", where dead animals are dumped, uncovered. Can you imagine how many dead cows must have been dumped from a place that houses so many cows? Thankfully, we never stumbled across the pit. A coyote must have found it though, because there was a leg, lying there in the field. My next up-close experience came just north of Morenci. I was surveying a property on 156 and Ridgeville, and the gentleman owner came out to find out if we were there to "do something about those hogs across the street".

It was a really cold day, thank goodness, but there were front-loader tractors across the street at the hog farm, stirring up the manure and spreading it around what looked like the parking lot. It was steaming away, and when the sun came out and the wind shifted, it was all my partner and I could do to finish our survey. The owner came out a few times to talk and walk with us. He talked about how long he'd lived there, mused as to how something like that farm could be legal, and worried about his grandchildren coming to play at his house with the stench and flies. Thankfully, I didn't have to survey any other mega-farm properties. We did, however, eat lunch in Hudson a lot. We saw the posters for the group "Environmentally Concerned Citizens of South Central Michigan" in the cafes and saw their signs in peoples front yards.

I've been to their website (<http://www.nocafos.org/>) and read up on all the blatant violations of the mega-farms. I heard the residents of the area wonder what to do about the fact that they can't open a window in the summer, can't use their contaminated well water, what the flies could give them if they land on them or get in their houses. They talked about how they're willing to leave the family farm, but can't get anyone to buy it.

I've seen the liquid manure being trucked out of the facilities, caps wide-open on top, spilling the waste on the road as they go around corners.

I've read about knowingly inadequate construction of retaining walls for the manure lagoons, that resulted in a massive spill-over. Walked along parts of the local rivers that are dead zones because of over application of the manure. If all this wasn't bad enough, these corporations have violated regulations, over and over again, with almost no punishment. Even after they're found in violation, they just keep on violating. It's not just the law they're violating. They're violating the land, the rivers and their neighbors. Please make the laws overseeing their actions more strict, the penalties for violations more severe, and actually act to enforce the laws. Their flagrant disregard has gone on too long.

Thank you,

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